FDA Declares Lab-Grown Chicken 'Safe to Eat' — But Scientists, Food Safety Advocates Have Questions

Describing the development as "a food revolution," the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday said that chemical analysis and advice exchanges have led to the agency's conclusion that cultivated chicken is the world's first commercially available lab-grown meat.

By Michael Nevradakis, Ph.D. | June 22, 2023 | 11:27am

Image credit: Getty Images

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Describing the development as "a food revolution," the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday said that chemical analysis and advice exchanges have led to the agency's conclusion that cultivated chicken is the world's first commercially available lab-grown meat.

Upside Foods, the cultivated cell culture technology to take long cells from chickens and grow the cells in a controlled environment to make the cultivated animal cell food, is "safe to eat."

The news — widely reported as the FDA "approval" of lab-grown meat or signifies the FDA's approval of lab-grown meat — is the culmination of a process Upside Foods initiated in 2018 to "cultivate" chicken cells that approval could soon be sold to the public, according to TIME.

Although two new states have banned the FDA can grant the product full approval, the agency's language suggests the approval is a foregone conclusion.

Upside Foods, on its website, at first touted that FDA approval as a key step.

"This landmark regulatory decision means the FDA accepts our safety conclusions and allows us to move forward with the next step in the voluntary FDA inspection and label approval."

The FDA and some media outlets cheered the news — but others, including scientists and food safety advocates, expressed concerns about the adequacy of the FDA's pre-market consultation process.

The agency's press release states that it "completed the safety of cultivated meat, which is produced with gene-edited cells, and some scientists argued that, despite claims to the contrary, the production process for lab-grown meat is energy-intensive and, as advertised, beneficial to the environment.

Some scientists have questioned whether the process is safe for the environment, and whether it is truly sustainable, as claimed by companies such as Upside Foods. Food and co-founder of The Kitchen, "a growing family of businesses that are committed to making access to real food," and the Breakthrough Energy Economic Forum (BEEF).

The FDA hasn't given approval — but more significant steps in that process completed

The Center for Food Safety said the about the FDA's announcement.

"The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently completed its consultation process with Upside Foods, Inc. and Good Meat, Inc. and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will now begin its review, which are grown in cells from cells extracted from living animals.

"This week's announcement by the FDA that it was reviewing the cultivated chicken 'meat' is the first indication that these products might come to market in the U.S."

According to the FDA, this first stage — known as a "pre-market consultation" of the FDA's "voluntary consultation process" — is "complete" and that the made from cultured animal cells."

As part of this consultation, according to the FDA:

> The FDA's pre-market consultation with the firm included an evaluation of the firm's production process and the cultured cell material made by the production process, including the establishment of cell banks and controls, manufacturing controls, and all components and inputs.
>
> The pre-market consultation is not an agency approval process. Instead, it means that after our careful evaluation of the data and information provided by the firm, we have no further questions at this time about the firm's safety conclusion."

In an exclusive interview with The Defender, Jaydee Hanson, policy director for the Center for Food Safety, questioned the FDA's characterization of the process.

"The FDA regulatory process in general relies on company testing of their products.

"The FDA, in this case, seemed to mostly review what the company sent them. It is not clear whether the FDA actually did any testing of the company to disclose its methods in a complete and transparent manner.

The next steps in the regulatory process involve the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), if the request is granted.

Upside Foods' Emeryville, California, production facility will be ready to produce more than 50,000 pounds of "cultivated" products, including a chicken fillet, per year, upon receipt of regulatory approval, the company said.

Upside Foods, FDA, media describe lab-grown meat as a 'food revolution,' tweeted moments, but regulatory process questioned

The FDA described the news of Upside Foods coming a step closer to full approval as a "food revolution," and the agency's press release states that the FDA "is committed to supporting innovation in the food industry."

TIME used remarkably similar language in its story, describing the FDA's announcement as "marking the stage for a new food revolution in which the world's meat is grown in bioreactors instead of on factory farms."

Bruce Friedrich, president of the Good Food Institute (GFI), said the FDA's announcement is "a critical milestone towards the future of food" that will "[change] the way we produce meat, [making] it more sustainable and humane."

And Dr. Uma Valeti, CEO and founder of Upside Foods, described the news as "a watershed moment in the history of food" in a statement, adding that "U.S. consumers will soon have the chance to eat delicious meat that's grown directly from animal cells."

In the same announcement, Valeti added:

> "We started Upside amid a world full of skeptics, and today, we've made history. I'm incredibly proud of our team and everyone in the Cultivated Meat from the FDA for cultivated meat.
>
> "This milestone marks a major step towards a new era in meat production."

Valeti is a member of the GFI's advisory board, although this conflict of interest was not disclosed in the TIME article.

Also noted by the Food Safety Center, the FDA's regulatory process, during the "pre-market consultation" was heavily reliant on:

> "In short, the documents shared by the firm and reviewed by the FDA show or where more research and more transparent data are needed, but this is a woefully deficient review by the FDA.
>
> "In its review of the company's documents, the FDA states it has no further questions about the company's conclusion that its cells are safe to eat. It raises questions in the name of protecting public health, consumers and policymakers deserve better."

The press release states that it had "no further questions" regarding Upside Foods' self-reported safety evaluation, which formed the basis of the FDA's decision to issue a letter stating that it had no "questions" at this time regarding the firm's process by which the cells for lab-grown meat are cultured and its GRAS oversight of this process.

While the FDA's review of the lab-grown meat cultivated food the U.S. approved as a chef, but grossly inadequate, in this "pre-market consultation," neither the FDA nor the USDA have yet established a regulatory framework for the labeling or oversight of lab-grown meat, including how the agencies will oversee the inspection and premises of animals.

The process, while the company insists that it uses genetic engineering to keep the cells growing, it fails to share which genes are being used. This is not surprising, considering that Upside Foods has refused to share this information with the public or with scientists. We should make certain that genetic engineering is done safely and that the public is informed."

Experts raise alarm about genetically engineered cells at center of issue

In this interview with The Defender, Hanson said that far from the company's claims that cultivating lab-grown meat will be safer, it could cause cancer and as part of this process requires that animals be damaged:

> "The science used by Upside to culture cells cultured food for U.S. approval as a chef, but grossly inadequate, in this 'pre-market consultation,' neither the FDA nor the USDA have yet established a regulatory framework for the labeling or oversight of lab-grown meat, including how the agencies will oversee the inspection and premises of animals.
>
> While the company insists that it uses genetic engineering to keep the cells growing, it fails to share which genes are being used. This is not surprising, considering that Upside Foods has refused to share this information with the public or with scientists. We should make certain that genetic engineering is done safely and that the public is informed."

Experts raise alarm about genetically engineered cells at center of issue

In this interview with The Defender, Claire Robinson, M.Phil., managing editor of GMWatch, said the gene editing process may have unintended effects that can adversely impact human health:

> "These were also risks with the old-style GMOs (genetically modified organisms), and they are still risks with these gene-edited GM plants with 'clean' DNA.
>
> "The risks, if you're using them, are that there will be knock-on effects from the gene edit, which may be unpredictable and may cause deficiencies or changes in the function of certain genes in the animal."

Michael Antoniou, Ph.D., an October 2022 interview with The Defender, agreed, stating that, "Everyday, genes are turning about cultivated meat, which is produced with gene-edited cells, and some scientists argued that, despite claims to the contrary, the production process for lab-grown meat is energy-intensive and, as advertised, beneficial to the environment.

A report published in the Journal of Genetics and Genomics in 2020 found that gene editing can cause "unintended alterations at the multiple ways of large and small mutations."

Antoniou described this as "a gene oversight, because we know that gene editing is not precise ... the evidence is there to show that you will always have unintended DNA damage in addition to what you want ... a whole spectrum of unintended DNA damage that accumulates at the multiple ways of large and small mutations."

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Antoniou and Robinson also raised ethical concerns regarding CRISPR. "Those unsupervised effects of CRISPR are very well recognized," Robinson said. "They've written about in the scientific literature."

Robinson expressed a similar perspective, describing such claims of environmental friendliness as:

> "A pipe dream, because the energy costs and the resource costs of bioreactor technologies are actually huge, and it's energy intensive to the point, especially in a climate of rising energy bills.
>
> "It simply won't be possible to feed thousands or millions of people on the products of these technologies."

Aside from high energy consumption, Hanson raised other potential environmental concerns involved with the process of developing lab-grown meat.

Hanson told The Defender:

> "Cell cultures require the use of antibiotics to ensure that the culture is not overtaken by pathogens. It is difficult to be sure that the cells that the company would take from poultry or meat animals are not infected with prions, viruses or bacteria.
>
> "Finally, the waste produced by the culturing process needs to be disposed of. It is not clear how that will be done, but it could be a source of water systems. Without more data on the chemicals being used and on the levels of electricity being used, it is difficult to know how much environmental impact the production system has."

Indeed, the FDA's scientific review accompanying its recent announcement, which was conducted by Upside Foods, lacks information on the chemicals involved with Upside Foods' manufacturing process, including:

- Cells from different time or species substitutions
- Carryover of antimicrobials against such as fungi, viruses, parvovirus, and prions during isolation
- Introduction of contaminants in laboratory reagents
- Introduction of contaminants from animal-derived reagents (e.g. bovine serum albumin)
- Unintended effects of mineralization.
- Contamination, and facility environment contamination, with adventitious agents through inadequate sterilization of bioreactors
- Presence of elemental contaminants (toxic heavy metals) after harvest.
- Presence of residual unintended material from genetic engineering.

However, despite these potential risks, the memo stated that "at this time we have no further questions regarding the firm's safety conclusion" and that would be expected to result in food that bears or contains any substance or microorganism that would adulterate the food."

As part of the next steps in the process, the "next meat" produced by Upside Foods will need to be inspected, as will the "the safety of manufacturing facilities as well as the cleanliness of the meat production process," TIME reported.

According to the FSIS, its next steps will be in close coordination with the FDA, as the agency "will review the labeling of meat and poultry products from the cell cultivation process" concerning lab-grown food products.

Of note, cultivated seafood, which Upside Foods also aims to develop, is "only regulated by the FDA and [does] not fall under USDA jurisdiction," according to TIME, meaning that it "could pass through the system even more quickly."

Lab-grown meat, thought to be pushed by Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and WEF

Upside Foods says it was founded in the world's first cultivated meat company in 2015 [and] has achieved numerous industry-defining milestones," including being the first company to produce multiple species of meat (beef, chicken and duck), "the largest single harvest of cultivated meat" and "the largest, most functional cultivated meat facility."

The company said it raised a total of $608 million, while countless other celebrities Upside's backer valuation at ranging between $1 billion and $3 billion.

The company brought in investors such as Bill Gates, Cargill and Richard Branson during its Series A funding round in 2017.

Gates is non-neutral, saying, "At rich countries should move to 100% synthetic meat."

The Daily Mail, quoting the Associated Press, noted Gates is considered the largest private owner of farmland in the U.S., having "quietly amassed" close to 270,000 acres.

Antoniou told The Defender:

> "Bill Gates has bought into [CRISPR] bigtime and increasingly, because he's also a huge proponent of genetic modification of crops for disease resistance ... because of his staunch belief in technological fixes to everything. I'm not surprised that now he's bought into the gene editing space as well."

According to Upside Foods, other investors in the company include Tyson Foods, Temasek, Norwest Venture Partners, Bill Gates' Breakthrough Energy Ventures and Bessemer — and Jeff Bezos' personal family office and part of the GFI advisory board along with Gates.

The largest donor to GFI is listed as the Open Philanthropy project, one of whose main founders is Dustin Moskovitz, co-founder of Facebook along with Eduardo Saverin.

As previously reported by The Defender, the project also bundles the jobs "cultivated meat" industry, which is "a key component of the Great Reset," behind a remarkably accurate messaging campaign in Tallahassee.

Gates, Bronson, Cargill, Tyson Foods and Kimball Musk also invested in Upside Foods by Series B funding round in 2020, which raised $400 million. According to Upside Foods, this funding was intended "to expand its production capacity and to bring its cultivated chicken products to consumers."

Notably, the FDA's press release said that it "is committed to supporting innovation in the food industry," a view supported in the World Economic Forum by "an impactful, scalable work to bring Real Food to everyone."

The WEF has repeatedly pushed lab-grown meat, claiming that it can "help end hunger."

Following the Series B funding round in 2020, Bronson, founder of the Virgin Group, remarked:

> "I am proud to invest once again in Memphis Meats [now Upside Foods], the world's leading cell-based meat company.
>
> "In the more few decades I believe that cell-based meat will become a major part of our global meat supply. I cannot wait for that day."

In turn, Elizabeth Gaucherbrand, managing director of Cargill's alternative protein team, stated at the time:

> "To meet the growing global demand for protein, it will take all of us working together to develop a variety of sustainable options.
>
> "The continued support for Upside's innovative work underscores Cargill's commitment to an inclusive approach to wholesome, sustainable protein that will meet customer and consumer needs now and in the future."

Highlighting the broader interest of many investors, including those coming from the "food industry," Upside Foods' Valeti said in a statement that "more than 100 companies are currently developing various forms of cultivated meat."

The FDA said it "is ready to work with additional firms developing cultured animal cell food and production processes to ensure their food is safe and lawful under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act."

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way to improve health of humans, the earth and the foods we consume. Quit growing so much grain to feed livestock....give them grass instead! Does anyone know how much grain is grown for booze? Just curious because I don't ever hear anyone talk about giving up their booze to help end hunger.

24 | Reply · Share ›

fedupwithlies → Beatrice · 15 days ago

Well..., they use Amazon to sell it. They forced those who were dumb enough to shop in their stores to wear masks and be vaccinated so, most likely, since The Insane Gates husband and wife team are probably vested into HOLE foods, I would guess that to be a resounding YES. And, true to HOLE Foods..., it will be way over priced. Haven't stepped in that store in years! NEVER stepping inside Amazon Fresh! That is a communist store. Cameras every square inch of the lot and interior.

6 | Reply · Share ›

Beatrice → fedupwithlies · 14 days ago

I didn't know that Amazon forced the vaccines at WF. I've never been to the Fresh version but it surely looks like communist dystopia. WF isn't that far behind. I've never cared for WF and it's ridiculously over-priced. I don't like the smell of Patchouli so it always made me feel sick. What I always found really disturbing was that the 'woke' shoppers were stupid enough to put the WF app on their phone and would waste so much time walking up and down the aisles staring at the their device looking for coupons (I guess) for items they could get cheaper at the local privately owned healthcare store. My gosh, just pay the full price if you value your freedom and privacy. I'm always stunned by people who are willing to sell their privacy for a few dollars or a free cupcake.

2 | Reply · Share ›

boxerdoglover → Beatrice · 6 days ago

I agree, Patchouli makes me want to hurl and gives me a migraine.

1 | Reply · Share ›

Cookiepress → Beatrice · 14 days ago

Encouraging Team Member Vaccinations: We strongly encourage all of our team members to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. from here. https://www.wholefoodsmarke...

1 | Reply · Share ›

QuantonQuale → Cookiepress · 5 days ago

Encouraging different from mandating.

1 | Reply · Share ›

old bat → fedupwithlies · 14 days ago · edited

wf near me didnt req the vax to shop, masks for a bit, yes, but only if they city required them. after that it was: if ur not vaxed, where a mask. but they can't enforce that. so it all may come down to not wf, but the law passed by the city or state.

3 | Reply · Share ›

Beatrice → old bat · 12 days ago

I think that was pretty much the standard rule for everyone/business.

| Reply · Share ›

Cookiepress → fedupwithlies · 14 days ago

I Went to a Whole Foods in SC when the mask mandate was on. I told the guy at the door that I couldn't wear one because I couldn't breathe with one on. He went and got me a face shield free to keep.

Reply · Share ›

PamelaZelle → Cookiepress · 14 days ago

Face shield/mask no difference. Complete tyranny.

3 | Reply · Share ›

old bat → Cookiepress · 14 days ago

which, of course, let all your germs out. not that a mask is much better. we just wear a very permeable mask when required. like silk chiffon. from etsy.

1 | 1 · Reply · Share ›

orwell11 → old bat · 13 days ago

Why didn't all of Sweden, where no masks were ever required or worn, die then?

2 | Reply · Share ›

Beatrice → orwell11 · 12 days ago

Good question and these are people who get very little natural vitamin D. Happiness does wonders for the immune system and I know first hand how much happier Swedes are than Americans.

| Reply · Share ›

Gabriella Klein → old bat · 6 days ago

People have breathed out germs from time immemorial. If you mean viruses, well, then, viruses can easily pass through masks, especially if they're made of fabric. It's like putting up a picket fence to keep out the insects.

1 | Reply · Share ›

Ann → old bat · 13 days ago

I cut away all but one layer of my cotton masks.

| Reply · Share ›

Grumpy Granny → Cookiepress · 6 days ago

My older son gave me a couple of fake masks. They look real until closer inspection shows the fabric is porous.

| Reply · Share ›

boxerdoglover → Beatrice · 6 days ago

Actually, they do think us peons are stupid. But they want to get rid of the really smart people too. That's how it works. Kill the ones who can give the others hope.

1 | Reply · Share ›

old bat → Beatrice · 14 days ago

livestock wont marble well on pasture. they will be less tender cuz of less fat. when sold, they will weigh less and the rancher is paid by weight.

1 | Reply · Share ›

Beatrice → old bat · 13 days ago

I don't agree. Some of the world's best marbled meat is 100 percent grass fed. The only reason they use grain or finish with grain is to fatten up the livestock because they sell by the pound.

3 | Reply · Share ›

boxerdoglover → old bat · 6 days ago

It's true, plus they need to raise them longer for the marbling. I don't like my steer to eat corn, partly because corn is GMO and secondly, it's not good for humans or animals. I've seen it when I have processed chickens for other people. When they are fed corn, they end up with tumors. There are plenty of other grains to feed them.

1 | Reply · Share ›

Ricky Ricardo → Beatrice · 6 days ago

Of course Half-foods will be selling it!

| Reply · Share ›

old bat → Beatrice · 14 days ago

they carry that other fake crap.

| Reply · Share ›

Catherine · 15 days ago

Fake Food.....

Bovine amniotic fluid.

Immortalized dead cells.

GMO Crisper genetics.

Verily....

It is Frankenstein Food.

Not interested. At. All. :(

19 | Reply · Share ›

LindaRivera · 15 days ago

Lab-grown meat, brought to you by Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and the WEF? And other ruthless billionaires and billionaire corporations who would NEVER dream of eating their disgusting Health Destroying, Life Shortening, FAKE, FRANKENSTEIN Foods. Only the Very Best, Organic, Grass Fed, Free Range Meat, Eggs, Dairy Cheese, and Organic Veg, Fruit and Grains for mulh millionaires and billionaires who view themselves as gods.

18 | Reply · Share ›

Grumpy Granny → LindaRivera · 6 days ago

Someday the Creator will let them know He doesn't like competition.

| Reply · Share ›

Woman · 15 days ago

OMG! Frankenstein food!! And this won't cause health problems? Give me a break!

18 | Reply · Share ›

BarbaraCharis → Woman · 15 days ago

I agree...totally unnatural. When food manufacturers set out to create food products...It is usually a disaster. If people knew they were creating illness everytime they put a profit-designed unhealthy food or beverage into their body... would they still do it?

5 | Reply · Share ›

John M. Burnley · 15 days ago

Gates and the WEF give it high praise - what could possibly be wrong with this - besides EVERYTHING!

16 | Reply · Share ›

jesusknight · 15 days ago

All those investors can have the first, middle, and last bite of all this fake meat.. ugh.. I'll stick with real beef, real chicken, real pork, etc. It's better for you and it tastes great!

16 | Reply · Share ›

Adrianne42 → jesusknight · 6 days ago

As long as your definition of "REAL" means grass fed, no hormone injections, no antibiotics, and not slathered with pesticides, ie Organic!!! But no pork please because it's just too bad for you in any of its forms.

Pork is high in cholesterol and can increase your risks of deadly diseases.

Most pig factories are overcrowded without adequate ventilation or cleanliness practices in place. Filth in these concentrations means that your meat will become contaminated.

Pigs can't sweat, so whatever they eat and how they live will stay in their fat even after death. Since they are scavenger feeders including feces and decaying matter, you will be consuming this along with the pork.

Pig livers are one of the leading carriers of Hepatitis E. This disease can cause several acute health problems, but can also lead to liver failure and death.

There is a very strong correlation between pork consumption and cirrhosis of the liver. Pork meat is very porous and is digested quickly, so all the toxins in the meat reach your liver more quickly than your liver could ever process them, overburdening your liver and causing liver damage.

| Reply · Share ›

Jeremy Forrest → Adrianne42 · 2 days ago · edited

If you're really that health conscious you wouldn't be eating meat at all! We are not carnivores in any sense of the word. I'm becoming more and more plant based as I age. Meat is so hard to digest, no fiber or enzymes. Meat also is carcinogenic when cooked at high temps heterocyclic amines are produced much like potatoes when fried have acrylamide! People think they're so well informed well there's layers upon layers, you only know what you know until you break old programming and seek new truths. I still eat meat and dairy but far less and always with veggies/fiber to help pass it through. Not one person here suffers from a protein deficiency, in fact too much is consumed shutting down kidneys and requiring dialysis.

| Reply · Share ›

jennygemmy · 15 days ago

Well whaddaya know, Gates is involved in this, and "Whole Paycheck" Bezos and the WEF. Color me shocked, SHOCKED!

14 | Reply · Share ›

Ave Elkr · 15 days ago

Absolutely EXCELLENT research! Funny how NPR and all the outlets fawning over lab-grown meat couldn't be bothered to so much as refer to the FDA's own scientific observations (never mind that the FDA seems to have "overlooked" them), or the conflict of interest between the Upside CEO and the guy from that foundation the CEO is on that everyone seems to be quoting that's gushing over lab grown meat, or Gates' prior statements on fake meat, or any of the many concerns with CRISPR (in fact I don't think any stories on this in the MSM even mentioned the term CRISPR from what I have seen), and in fact they are presenting this as an approval even if it's not (yet). Those Gates and Bozoss billions really go a long way towards closing mouths it seems!

12 | Reply · Share ›

kaoshipano · 15 days ago

If that fake meat is made by genetic modification.... is bad, we know this, but really happens that ALL THIS is made for consume FOR KILLING PEOPLE, since decades about the GMOs, this is the issue , the real one, killing people above the world BY THE GEORGIA STONE mandat.

12 | Reply · Share ›

chris · 15 days ago

Sorry, but I have to ask an extremely brutal question:

Why 'they'--FDA/USDA/GOV/Gates+Musk et al. Billionaers+Upsidelor better DOWNside monsters), do not kill us all at once, for good?? They'd keep their planet and could 'live' until the end of their times?? Why these criminals prefer torture before actually killing the entire humanity?? They are almost there, with the BILLIONS of genetically modifying injections, already carrying substantial patented pieces of the old AND the new GMO plant hybrids, and clearly damaging the HUMAN muscles of the heart, in particular! When you read that patent for the 'cultured meet' one can really get a goose skin, it is clearly 'something' what has NOTHING TO DO with food for HUMANS, AT ALL!!! Here the abstract for those who know some background:

"A product and process for extending the replicative capacity of metazoan somatic cells using targeted genetic amendments to abrogate inhibition of cell-cycle progression during replicative senescence and derive clonal cell lines for scalable applications and industrial production of metazoan cell biomass. An insertion or deletion mutation using guide RNAs targeting the first exon of the transcript encoding each protein is created using CRISPR/Cas9. Targeted amendments result in inactivation of p15 and p16 proteins which

see more

11 | Reply · Share ›

boxerdoglover → chris · 6 days ago

Well, they tried with the jab to get rid of billions. They didn't count on so many refusing it.

| Reply · Share ›

LW · 15 days ago

Can't make this sh*t up. Good lord.

11 | Reply · Share ›

Lonnie Gordon · 15 days ago

Soylent Green by another name. Will these foods be labeled as GMO or Lab Grown? How are consumers to know what they are buying? I would never eat these products, so I am happy I am a vegan and can still buy organic and non-GMO foods. I don't trust the FDA at all, and with Bill Gates involved you can be sure this is not a healthy food.

I do not support factory farming and the abuse it causes to millions of animals, but this is scary, because a large majority of the population doesn't read food labels, and do not care what they put in their bodies if it tastes good to them. What a weird world this has become..

11 | Reply · Share ›

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